

OBITUARY - RALPH KATZ JANUARY 8, 1997

In our synagogue's prayer book the Yizkor memorial service includes the following passages -

The Lord's compassion for his worshipers, His righteousness to children's children, remain, age after age, unchanging.

Three score and ten our years may number, four score years if granted the vigor.

At 72 Ralph Katz was granted his three score and ten years but the vigor to carry on was not there. Even in the last hours of his life, Ralph's mind was sharp, his thoughts clear, and he was fully aware of his loved ones around him. But his body that had suffered through illness and pain over the past few years could not maintain the will of his mind.

So while saddened that a man who had so much more to give is gone we are fortunate to have shared some of our lives with such a righteous man.

Ralph was born in London, England. His father was a chazzan, a cantor, in one of England's largest synagogues. His early years were spent immersed in Jewish life and ritual. Even though both his parents died when he was very young he retained the traditional Jewish teachings of compassion to family and friends.

Ralph was an educated man having earned his University degree in England, but rather than continue into the professions or the arts, Ralph chose to follow a career in the food business after discovering his love of cooking as an army chef during World War II.

Following the war which saw him stationed for 5 and a half years in Egypt and India Ralph returned to England and became a pastry chef. In the early part of his career he was part of the team that decorated the wedding cake for the future Queen of England, Elizabeth II.

In 1955 Ralph and Trudy moved to Canada, settling first in Brantford, Ontario where he worked as a chef in a restaurant and later in Sault Ste. Marie. Ralph and Trudy took active roles in the small Jewish communities in these cities. They helped cater synagogue functions and Ralph's early training in synagogue ritual allowed him to add to the quality of the synagogue services. More than 30 years after leaving Ontario they still have friends who have kept in touch.

In 1965 Ralph and Trudy, now blessed with a daughter and two sons moved to Edmonton. Thinking that it was perhaps time for a career change Ralph became a life insurance salesman. True to form he was a success and Trudi remembers weekends in Jasper as rewards for winning sales competitions. But despite this Ralph still longed to return to the food business.

Over the next 20 years whether as a restaurant owner, caterer, cook in northern mining or oil camps or as head of the kitchens in Canterbury Court, Ralph ensured that his clients ate food that he was proud to serve. He was meticulous about the way meals were prepared. He cared about people and felt that because someone was posted hundreds of miles from home or was living out there last days in a retirement home, that was no reason for them to not experience the pleasure of delicious food.

And much to the credit of his customers and friends his efforts were appreciated. Marvin proudly states that no one ever had a bad word to say about his father.

Over the past four years when illness prevented Ralph from working and his ability to get around was reduced there was no shortage of friends and neighbours who offered to help wherever and whenever they could.

He was respected and loved by his family. Even when he was away on a job or busy working long hours in the city he always had time to help his children with their questions or problems. When he was mad and had to yell at the boys, he made sure this was followed by a big hug. His advice to them was simple and straightforward. - It doesn't matter what you do, just be the best.

Sitting with his family yesterday there was a sense of disbelief that Ralph was gone. Even though he has spent so much time in the hospital recently his presence was always felt. Almost to the end he cooked for others with the help of a special chair that he could use in his kitchen.

We talked just a few weeks ago during a previous hospital stay and he was optimistic about his recovery. He maintained his dry English humour which helped him through his pain.

Ralph Katz was an example of someone who loved his work and took pride in it. He wouldn't settle for anything but the best. Ralph died peacefully knowing that his family was near.

His wish was that he could do more for others. We know that he did more than enough but are still saddened that his days were cut short before his wish could be fulfilled.